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Report

No. 47. VTR group interviews  
with American tourists who have  
not visited Canada. 1970.







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no. 47. VTR GROUP

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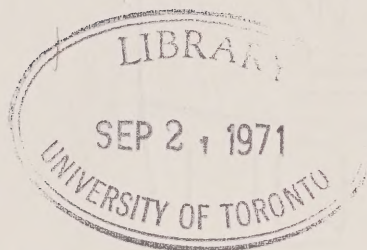
INTERVIEWS WITH  
AMERICAN TOURISTS  
WHO HAVE NOT  
VISITED CANADA

Prepared For  
The Department of Tourism and Information  
Province of Ontario

Travel research branch

September 1970

Prepared By  
The Marketing and Research Department  
JAMES LOVICK LIMITED  
Toronto



## PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Herein are reported the findings from a series of videotape-recorded (VTR) interviews with American tourists who can be considered to be potential visitors to Ontario and Canada. This "potential" is based on the fact that the respondents in these interviews all:

- were married and in the 30--50 age bracket.
- have taken an automobile vacation trip in the past two years of 500 miles or more.
- have annual family incomes of \$10,000 or more.
- have never been to Canada.

The basic purpose of the research was to study why these people have never been to Canada or, more specifically, Ontario, since the criteria listed above put them in the category of "prime prospects" from the Department of Tourism's standpoint. It was equally basic to study ways and means by which they might be induced to vacation in Ontario in the future.

The VTR technique of interviewing has been explained in full detail in proposals and reports submitted to the Department of Tourism in 1969, and need not be

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elaborated on in this report. The only difference between this year's interviews and those of 1969 was in locale and method of respondent recruitment.

These interviews were conducted in Chicago and New York city in the Spring of 1970. The Chicago series of interviews consisted of four sessions, with six to eight respondents per session. Two evening sessions were among husbands and wives who met the stated criteria; the other two sessions were held in the afternoon with female heads of households who also met the qualifications. In New York, two VTR sessions were held in the evening with eight and ten respondents, all married couples from the New York area; these persons, too, fitted the stated criteria.

Recruitment was handled by telephone, using a screening questionnaire to weed out those who did not fit the definition of "prime prospect". Those who did were invited to a central interviewing location and were compensated in varying amounts for their co-operation.





AREAS OF INQUIRY

The following areas of inquiry were covered in each of the VTR sessions, although not necessarily in the sequence listed:

- Area(s) visited in past.
- Why locale was chosen.
- When final destination or itinerary was decided on.
- Informational in-puts used in the decision-making process.
- The role of various family members in deciding the vacation.
- Area(s) intended to visit and the factors influencing that choice, as illustrated above.
- What is looked for in a vacation, by each family member.
- The influence and effect of other family members on a final choice, and the interaction of these influences.
- Sources of information used in vacation planning.
- Awareness of advertising by vacation destinations and carriers.
- Awareness of advertising by media.
- General awareness of Ontario and Canada.
- Attitudes thereto.
- Why Ontario and/or Canada was not visited in past.



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- Advertising awareness.
- What information is desirable or needed in inducing future visits to Ontario and Canada.

In addition, some respondents volunteered comments pertinent to the subject of family vacations that were not in the protocol used by the group monitor, and reference to these are made in the ensuing discussion where appropriate.

#### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

While the group interview technique is not quantitative in nature--the sample sizes involved are not large--it is most useful for purposes of this study to compare the similarities and differences of prospective Ontario visitors from New York city versus those of Chicago, as some clearly discernible patterns emerged which would most likely be verified by large-scale sampling.





PAST VACATIONS

Chicago and New York vacation travellers revealed distinctly different patterns and preferences in not only their 1969 vacations, but in vacationing habits in general.

The Chicago-area respondents tended to be more outdoor-oriented and vacationed in nearby Midwestern areas that offered outdoor vacationing opportunities.

The New York respondents were more comfort-oriented in their use of accommodations and choice of vacation sites. They also appeared to be somewhat more sophisticated and were more likely to travel further from the New York city area than Chicagoans were likely to travel from their home.

The reasons for this divergence of vacation "life styles" appear to be attributable to a combination of geographic factors and general environment.

A number of Chicago residents that were studied were born in other areas of the Midwest; specifically, Wisconsin and Minnesota. New York respondents were almost all native-born. The Midwesterners were more familiar with the vacation opportunities in nearby





states that appealed to their outdoor leisure time activities. It would seem that being raised in or near areas where outdoor activity is prevalent influenced their preference for outdoor vacationing later on in life.

The New Yorkers, on the other hand, being raised in an urban environment, were not nearly as prone toward camping and fishing activities as were the Chicagoans. Instead, they preferred vacation sites where more of the amenities of civilization were available. They preferred motel or resort living to camping or even cottage vacations.

Florida, in particular, but also Bermuda and the Bahamas, were the subject of voluntary discussion as places having been visited on past vacations, and also more desirable future vacation destinations. Sunshine, beaches and accommodations appeared to be the main attractions of these areas to New Yorkers, along with a general image of glamour.

But even those New Yorkers who did not vacation in these "glamour" areas revealed a pattern of vacationing that was more urbane. Thus, the couple who drove





through the Pennsylvania-Dutch country in 1969, and then on up through New England, stayed at motels or hotels. Or the couple that planned to drive to California with their children intended to stay at motels along the way and in the large California cities on arrival.

The Chicagoans, on the other hand, who travelled beyond the Midwest states, "roughed it" when stopping. The Chicago couple who went to California took along their camping trailer. So did the visitors to Colorado and Yellowstone Park. And the couple who intended in 1970 to go to Canada (the Rockies) were going on a camping trip with their children.

Another factor contributing to this divergence in vacationing styles between the residents of these two large cities would appear to be one of simple geography, in addition to early environment. Little more than 150 miles north of Chicago is referred to locally as "the North Woods". This includes northern Wisconsin, almost all of Minnesota, and northern Michigan (including the peninsula). This is a region that is virtually undistinguishable from much of Northern Ontario in terms of



topography and ecology. It is much easier for a Chicagoan to reach these areas via car than it is for a New Yorker to reach similar areas.

Thus, New Yorkers would have to travel further away from the city to have an outdoors vacation than do Chicagoans. One hundred and fifty miles north of New York city is still fairly highly urbanized, it is not actually part of the "urban sprawl" that is the similar distance from Chicago. Many parts of central New York State are not urbanized, it is true, and much of this is "lake country". But New York city residents did not discuss this region at all. Nor did they discuss north central Pennsylvania, which is even closer to the city and less settled than New York State. These areas, it would seem, do not appeal to New York city residents anywhere nearly as much as do similar areas in the Midwest appeal to Chicagoans.





1970 AND FUTURE VACATIONS

The vacations planned for 1970 by the respondents in each group indicate no difference in general pattern than those discussed in 1969 and earlier vacations. The Chicagoans were going camping or to the cottage and the New Yorkers were going to the South or West and were going to stay at motels.

At the time of these interviews--April and May--most respondents had a fairly clear idea as to where they were going. Because of their particular proclivities, New Yorkers indicated that they may give further advance thought and planning to their vacations than did Chicagoans. If one is staying at a motel or a resort, particularly in Florida, reservations are generally needed. But campers generally tend to "play it by ear", stopping at night where they can. Further, campers did not have a definite itinerary set; they were visiting a general region. New Yorkers, on the other hand, were going to a specific destination and were going to stay in that immediate area.

One trait that both groups did have in common was the tendency to take multiple vacations throughout the year.





Generally, this was two vacations. But New York couples appeared to share their split vacations together, whereas there appeared to be more of a tendency for Chicagoans to take a family vacation in the summer, and then for the husband to take an additional week in the Spring or Fall--again, an outdoors vacation.

Here again, however, a divergence appeared between the two groups. Among the New York couples, the wife appeared to play a more influential role in deciding where to go and stay, although she did not have the final say-so. Perhaps this was due more to the fact that both husband and wife preferred the same type of vacations among New Yorkers than did Chicagoans. Chicago husbands, on the other hand, appeared to be much more influential in deciding where to go and what type of vacation to take. Some Chicago-area housewives who went on outdoors vacations did not particularly prefer these, but yielded to her husband's preferences. These housewives would prefer to stay at a resort or motel, where they could get away from the drudgery of everyday housework, and they could not do this on a camping trip, or staying at a cottage. Still, there they went.



ONTARIO AND CANADA

In discussing Ontario and Canada as a vacation site, both groups shared a number of common attitudes, although the reasons behind these were different.

First, was low interest in a Canadian vacation. Neither Canada, much less Ontario, were brought up voluntarily by any respondent in any of the six group sessions discussed, in spite of numerous opportunities to do so. Instead, the subject of Ontario and Canada had to be brought up by the interviewer, and this was done so usually twenty to thirty minutes after the session was underway.

When the subject was brought up, the respondents generally referred to "Canada" instead of "Ontario" (the latter had to be introduced into the discussion even after the subject of Canada had been broached). After Ontario was mentioned, the term of reference preferred was still Canada and when the two names were then used interchangeably. Respondents did not seem to distinguish in their minds between the two. This low interest is not to be confused with "low awareness". Of course, everyone had heard of Canada and everyone knew that you





could take a vacation there, but nobody discussed it voluntarily.

"Ontario" was a somewhat different matter. Beyond low interest, there was a problem of awareness. Or, more precisely, of "knowledge". Most had heard of the term "Ontario" before, but they were vague as to what it was. Some thought it was a city or town, others even more vaguely referred to it as an "area in Canada". There were scant few who correctly identified it as a Province, or even less accurately, as a "State in Canada". And no one thought of it in terms of a vacation destination.

When the subject of "a vacation in Ontario" was brought up, the initial reaction was silence indicating surprise. This was accompanied by smiles, shrugs and glances at each other (or at the interviewer) that registered amusement, bemusement and some embarrassment at having to discuss a subject that one knew little, and probably cared less, about.

Because of this lack of knowledge and awareness, and because most respondents preferred to talk in terms of "Canada", any further references to "Canada" in



this report may also be construed as references to Ontario.

Behind this lack of knowledge and interest were two sharply different attitudes on the part of Chicagoans and New Yorkers.

The Chicagoans, remember, were almost all outdoors-oriented vacationers. And they vacationed frequently in Wisconsin and Minnesota--states quite similar to much of Ontario. Thus, they explained their lack of vacationing in Ontario as being due to the fact that Ontario offered nothing different from what they could get in their traditional vacationing areas. This may be a fairly accurate statement in general. Whether, in fact, it is not true, insofar as Ontario being less crowded or less polluted, is rather academic, because none of the Chicago-area outdoorsmen indicated any dissatisfaction with their present vacation sites in this regard.

The Chicago area respondents (as were the New Yorkers) were screened prior to the interview so that only families who had not taken a vacation in Canada were to be interviewed. In point of fact, however, a number





of the Chicago respondents had been to Ontario. But these were only short-term visits of a day or less. These included visits to Windsor or Niagara Falls where they entered Canada just so they could say they were out of the country. Another family visited Port Arthur while camping out in Minnesota for that same reason. Another had been in Rainy Lake partly by happenstance, explaining "as long as it's there we'll stop". (It was on this visit that Ft. Francis was compared to Gary, Indiana, to which the former was found to be a "backward town".)

That these respondents, who were supposed to have been screened out of the interview as having visited Canada in the past, failed to remember their visits in the screening process--however short-term they may have been--underlines the low level of interest and awareness that both Canada and the Province of Ontario are confronted with in the minds of many prospective visitors.

Thus, Northern Ontario (at least the southern fringe) is considered by Chicagoans as offering nothing different in the way of an outdoors vacation that cannot be had in Minnesota or Wisconsin. The family that intended to go to Banff explained their interest in



this region, as opposed to Ontario, as being different from what they could get in Minnesota or Wisconsin.

The New Yorkers, on the other hand, while displaying the same low degree of interest in, and knowledge of, Ontario gave different reasons. Their image of Ontario was different than that of the Midwesterners. Their references were in more Eastern-oriented terms, rather than Northern-oriented. There were references to Montreal in the same context as Ontario. Ontario, like Canada in general, was seen as being cold and offering nothing of particular interest (with the possible exception of the French influence). There was a smattering of knowledge of such places as Ottawa and Fort Henry and Stratford, but references to these places were made with an air of indifference, and only in response to direct questioning.

While Ontario was seen as offering good fishing, hunting and outdoor opportunities (activities of little interest to these New Yorkers), this was considered to be true of Canada in general.

The New Yorkers generally indicated more of an interest in cultural matters and historical sites than did the





Chicagoans, but there was very little knowledge of any cultural/historical attractions on the part of most New York respondents.

Neither Canada nor Ontario has a "foreign" image in the minds of the New Yorkers and Chicagoans (with the exception of French Canada). It does have somewhat of a "different" image, however, in that it is seen as being cold and less settled than the U. S. But from a cultural standpoint, there is little difference in the minds of most Chicagoans and New Yorkers--or, most Americans, for that matter--between the U. S. and Canada. This, of course, merely corroborates what has been found in earlier investigations into this area.

Generally, the image of Ontario in the minds of New Yorkers appears to be more diffuse than that of the Midwesterners. (One New York respondent saw no point in going to Ontario when the same scenery could be seen by driving through Ohio. Few Midwesterners would agree with this statement.) But the real problem appears to be one of no image at all, instead of an incorrect or unfavourable one. And this lack of



image may be both a cause and reflection of the low level of interest in an Ontario or Canadian vacation in the minds of New Yorkers.



THE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING AND OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES

Both New York and Chicago groups were similar in that, when questioned on advertising they had seen for vacation sites, they first talked about newspaper Travel Section advertising. And then travel advertising in magazines. And then, perhaps, some air carrier advertising on television. But there was little or no playback of advertising for a specific destination, or by a specific destination, that could be attributed to one particular advertiser.

The observation made in the 1969 report about references to newspaper Travel Section advertising would seem to apply here, to the effect that, a) everyone has seen some travel advertising at some point in the recent past, and, b) even if they cannot recall what it was, it must have been in the newspaper Travel Section. Playback of this nature is meaningless; it is merely "safe guessing".

Likewise, references to magazine advertising. There were generalized references to most of the mass circulation U. S. magazines--again of the "I must have seen it there" type of response. There were one or two





references that might, however vague, be construed to be a reflection of some exposure to C.G.T.B. magazine advertising. But nothing that could be interpreted as a major penetration of consumer awareness in terms of positive identification.

Similarly, when queried specifically about travel advertising on television, the playback was almost equally as vague. Here, however, there were respondents who did indicate that they had seen some Ontario advertising, by virtue of their mention of the "Friendly, familiar, foreign and near" theme and/or the Ontario song.

But most references to advertising placed by any Canadian source dealt with Expo '67 and were only of the most general nature.

The New York area respondents were more aware of TV travel advertising than were the Chicago respondents. Most of this was playback of air carrier advertising, however.



There was no indication that any advertising played a decisive role in the choice of a vacation destination. And there was scant little more indication by those respondents who sought out information on a vacation site as a result of seeing or hearing an advertisement--such as writing in or clipping a coupon--were decisively influenced by that particular piece of information to go to a particular destination.

Still, most respondents did seek out information on a vacation site prior to visiting there. This was more true of the New York area respondents, whose travel habits and preferences dictated more of a need for advance information--if only for reservations--than did the Chicago outdoor types.

None of which is to negate the need for advertising as was indicated in the discussion on awareness and attitudes toward Ontario/Canada in the preceding section.

The decision-making process in vacation-planning is little understood for most individual families, the vast amount of research that has been done in this area notwithstanding. When millions of vacation trips by Americans are viewed as a whole, the role of any





source or medium of information--whether it be by advertising or promotional literature or word-of-mouth or by publicity of whatever nature--is virtually impossible to define with any degree of precision.

The absence of such, however, is not difficult to evaluate. If people are not aware of a product and what it has to offer--whether it be a vacation site or a package of detergent--then they won't buy.

This last point was made by the respondents in both cities. When asked what was needed to induce them to come to Ontario many respondents said simply "advertise". They went beyond this, of course. They wanted to know what accommodations were available, what there was to see and do, what were the road conditions and distances involved, what regulations, if any, were involved in crossing the border, etc. In short, questions that might be asked by any prospective purchaser of a product or service who was not aware of the benefits or rewards to be received.

A few of the respondents had written to Canada or Ontario in the past (they were not sure which) for information and indicated that the literature they



received was quite adequate. But even these respondents displayed little knowledge of Canada or Ontario, the time-factor presumably accounting for this, assuming that they had read the literature to begin with.

The subject of Canadian Information Offices was brought up, since C.G.T.B. maintains such in both New York and Chicago. None of the respondents had ever visited either of these offices. The Chicagoans seemed to be aware that there was such a facility maintained in that city and guessed that it was on Michigan Ave. (it is not), as that is the locale of many offices maintained by travel advertisers, travel agents and air carriers.

The New Yorkers were even less sure of the existence of such an office in their city. They thought that there might be one (it seemed a likely possibility), but had no idea where it might be--with the possible exception of a woman who worked in the office building at 680 Fifth Avenue.\* After about ten minutes of discussion, she allowed as how she may have been passing it every day to and from work. But, still, she wasn't sure. This is known as "an awareness problem".

\* This is the location of the C.G.T.B. office in New York, on the ground floor.



NOTE

In April, 1969, James Lovick Limited, for its own use, conducted audio-tape recorded interviews with two groups of prospective travellers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The subjects discussed in those sessions covered many of the same areas as those in the New York and Chicago interviews a year later.

The findings that emerged from the Pittsburgh groups differed little from those uncovered in 1970. Canada, and especially Ontario, have a low level of interest and knowledge in the minds of Pittsburghers as a desirable vacation destination.

The 1969 Pittsburgh respondents resembled the 1970 Chicago respondents in vacation habits and attitudes much more than they did the New Yorkers. Pittsburghers were more outdoors-oriented, and the male appears to play a more influential role in deciding where and when to go. Pittsburghers did play back some awareness of Ontario TV advertising, which was running in that city while the interviews took place.

The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the car was the cold. It was a sharp contrast to the warm blanket of the car's interior. I shivered slightly, pulling my coat tighter around me. The air was crisp and clear, a welcome change from the smoggy atmosphere of the city. I took a deep breath, savoring the freshness. The sun was shining brightly, casting long shadows on the pavement. I walked briskly, my mind racing with thoughts of the day ahead. The streets were quiet, with only a few cars visible in the distance. I felt a sense of peace and solitude, a moment of quiet reflection in a busy world. The scent of autumn leaves filled the air, a reminder of the season's passage. I continued my walk, the sun warming my face, the cold air invigorating my senses. It was a perfect morning, a day to cherish and remember.







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